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Summary record of the 4th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 10 October 2007, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. Mohamed ..... (Sudan)
later: Mr. Maleki (Vice-Chairman) ..... (Iran)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Agenda item 40: Implementation of the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples (Territories not covered under other items) (*continued*)

Hearing of petitioners (*continued*)

Question of Western Sahara (A/C.4/62/3/Add.1, Add.7, Add.10, Add.11, Add. 13, Add.15, Add.18, Add.21, Add.24, Add.25, Add.27, Add.31, Add.32, Add.33, Add.37, Add.39, Add.40, Add.41, Add.46, Add.47, Add.50, Add.51 and Add.53)

1. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Lecoq (Deputy, Seine-Maritime, France)took a place at the petitioners' table.*

2. **Mr. Lecoq** (Deputy, Seine-Maritime, France), said that the recent negotiations between the Government of Morocco and the Frente Popular para la Liberación de Saguía el-Hamra y de Río de Oro (Frente POLISARIO) in the framework of Security Council resolution 1754 (2007) had opened the door to finding a lasting solution to the question of Western Sahara in conformity with international law and he urged the international community to support the negotiations process.

3. Morocco's occupation of Western Sahara had lasted over 30 years and was threatening to undermine the stability of the region as a whole. Morocco's latest initiative for negotiating an autonomy statute for the Sahara region was aimed at depriving the Saharan people of their right to self-determination. In treating the question of Western Sahara as an internal matter, the Government of Morocco had refused to acknowledge the existence of the Saharan Arab Democratic Republic. Given that the Government did not respect basic human rights in the occupied Territory, the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) should step up its efforts to protect the Saharan activists.

4. *Mr. Lecoq withdrew.*

5. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Lord Newall (International Committee for the Tindouf Prisoners) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

6. **Lord Newall** (International Committee for the Tindouf Prisoners) said that the Moroccan initiative concerning autonomy should be welcomed as a democratic proposal that had been largely endorsed by the international community. It was unclear why the Frente POLISARIO continued to insist on a referendum given that the United Nations had been unable to organize a referendum in the past. Instead of engaging in constructive dialogue the Frente POLISARIO had shown defiance towards the international community.

7. The Moroccan prisoners in the Tindouf camps had been kept in inhumane conditions for over 25 years and were considered the longest-serving prisoners of war in the world. Some had died from torture and malnutrition and had been buried in the desert; their families were calling on the Algerian authorities to allow them to repatriate the bodies. His organization called on the Government of Algeria to provide compensation to the prisoners, to respond favourably to the requests of the families of the disappeared, to bring to justice those responsible for human rights abuses and to give due consideration to the Moroccan initiative for autonomy.

8. *Lord Newall withdrew.*

9. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Ms. Motta (Associazione Jaima Sahrawi) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

10. **Ms. Motta** (Associazione Jaima Sahrawi), speaking as a member of the parliamentary friendship group with the Saharan people, said that the Italian Chamber of Deputies had recently voted to support the right to self-determination of the Saharan people in keeping with its long-standing commitment to the latter. Western Sahara was the only Territory in Africa which had not been given the opportunity to exercise its right to self-determination.

11. In order for the Organization to fulfil its obligations with respect to protection, the Secretary-General should gather impartial information on the health, education and socio-economic conditions of the Saharan people. The United Nations should act as advocate for the Saharan people both as regards their human rights and as regards exploitation of the natural resources of their Territory. Finally, she called for the formulation of appropriate programmes of assistance in order to promote economic and social progress of the Saharan people in keeping with the formulation of appropriate programmes of assistance to promote economic and social progress for the Saharan people in keeping with the spirit of General Assembly

resolution 60/112. Those actions would show the Saharan people that the international community had not forgotten about their right to self-determination.

12. *Ms. Motta withdrew.*

13. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Dauger (Association des Amis de la République Arabe Sahraouie Démocratique) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

14. **Mr. Dauger** (Association des Amis de la République Arabe Sahraouie Démocratique) said that although Morocco had attempted to justify its occupation of Western Sahara for more than 30 years, not a single Government recognized Morocco's claim of sovereignty over Western Sahara.

15. The Saharan people were suffering from that occupation: they lacked food and medical facilities and their Territory's natural resources were being pillaged by the occupying Power. Moreover, human rights activists were being subjected to arbitrary arrest, torture and inhumane and degrading treatment. The media had been prevented from reporting those crimes. His organization called on the General Assembly to facilitate the organization of a referendum on self-determination and, in the meantime, to protect the people by ensuring respect for their rights, as refugees, to receive adequate care and attention and their rights, as human beings, to express themselves freely.

16. *Mr. Dauger withdrew.*

17. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Paech (Member of the German Bundestag) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

18. **Mr. Paech** (Member of the German Bundestag), after briefly outlining the history of the issue, starting with the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice of 16 October 1975, said that independent observers continued to denounce inter alia the suffering endured by refugees living in the Tindouf camps for the past 15 years, and the brutal repression of activists by the police.

19. He welcomed Security Council resolution 1754 (2007), which called upon the parties to enter into negotiations without preconditions in good faith and which upheld the right of the Saharan people to decide on their future. The Council had rejected the Government of Morocco's precondition that it would only negotiate on the basis of its initiative for autonomy within Moroccan borders. The negotiations could not succeed unless the Government of Morocco acknowledged the right of the Saharan people to decide on their future through a free and transparent referendum in conformity with international law.

20. *Mr. Paech withdrew.*

21. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Ms. Terzi (Associazione Jaima Sahrawi) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

22. **Ms. Terzi** (Associazione Jaima Sahrawi) said that various local organizations in Italy had undertaken sensitization campaigns and established cooperation programmes aimed at alleviating the suffering of the Saharan people. Although the Government of Morocco had long been able to control information about what was going on in Western Sahara, by restricting access thereto, Saharan political activists were now making use of information and communication technologies to provide the international community with evidence of the acts of repression perpetrated by the Armed Forces. In May 2006, an UNHCR delegation had visited the occupied territories and the Tindouf refugee camps and had concluded that most of the human rights violations were the result of the Saharan people being denied their right to self-determination.

23. The continued failure to resolve the conflict in Western Sahara threatened to undermine the security and economic development of the region as a whole. She therefore called on the United Nations to step up its efforts to find a solution that respected the right of the Saharan people to self-determination.

24. *Ms. Terzi withdrew.*

25. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Assor (Surrey Three Faiths Forum) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

26. **Mr. Assor** (Surrey Three Faiths Forum) welcomed the European initiative to open a permanent base in Tindouf to oversee the distribution of aid and ensure it did not go astray. The United Nations should insist on a similar arrangement with the Frente POLISARIO and Algeria, in order to speed up much-needed assistance to the population of the Tindouf camps.

27. Finally, he expressed support for the Moroccan initiative for negotiating autonomy statute for the Sahara region (S/2007/206), which should lead to free

access and freedom of movement for the refugees in Tindouf. The international community must ensure that it was implemented so as to finally free the refugees from oppression.

28. *Mr. Assor withdrew.*

29. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Ms. da Roeck (Belgian Interparliamentary Group for Peace in the Western Sahara) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

30. **Ms. da Roeck** (Belgian Interparliamentary Group for Peace in the Western Sahara) stressed the importance of respect for human rights and international legitimacy for the resolution of any international conflict and expressed concern at the reluctance of the Moroccan delegation to the Belgian Parliament to reveal any details about the new Moroccan proposal for a settlement in Western Sahara. Unfortunately, there was very little awareness in the international community, including on the part of politicians, about that conflict.

31. Those concerned about the situation of Western Sahara had an obligation to educate the world community, especially young people, about the will of the Saharan people, whether living under occupation or in exile, to assert their right to self-determination. The time for empty words was over. The international community must ensure that Morocco complied with international law, put an end to its repression of the Saharan people and allowed them to return to their homeland. In addition, she stressed that respect for human rights, democracy and international legitimacy must be the foundation for any plan for autonomy in the region.

32. *Ms. da Roeck withdrew.*

33. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Carloni (City Council Member) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

34. **Mr. Carloni** (City Council Member) said that the question of Western Sahara continued to affect relations among the States of the Maghreb. Unfortunately the referendum process had proved impossible to implement because of the intrinsic characteristics of the Saharan population. He therefore welcomed the holding of two rounds of talks between the two parties in Manhasset. Morocco had proposed to grant the Western Saharan people a large degree of autonomy within Morocco.

35. He regretted that the position of the Frente POLISARIO and Algeria remained rigid and uncompromising and stressed that reason and realism, based on the de facto situation in the region, required the Frente POLISARIO and Algeria to show more flexibility in order to end the suffering of the Saharan people in the camps at Tindouf. Algeria, in particular, as the host and unconditional supporter of the Frente POLISARIO must take advantage of the next round of talks to work towards autonomy for the Saharan people.

36. Turning to the humanitarian aspects of the conflict, he said that the population of the Tindouf camps was subjected to massive human rights violations, such as forced deportation to Cuba, torture, inhumane treatment and summary execution. Freedom of movement and expression were strictly controlled by the Frente POLISARIO and Algeria's military security forces severely punished dissent. Humanitarian aid sent to the camps was resold on the black market for the benefit of the Polisario leadership. While acknowledging the work of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, for example in organizing family visits between Tindouf and the southern provinces of Morocco, he deplored the refusal of the Algerian authorities to allow that Office to undertake a census of the population in the camps.

37. He called on the international community to support negotiations between the two parties aimed at a referendum on self-determination leading to autonomy for the region. The international community must take steps to end the suffering in the camps and prosecute those responsible. The blockade around the camps must be lifted and the population allowed to return to their homeland in safety.

38. *Mr. Carloni withdrew.*

39. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Ms. Ait-Baala (Action Internationale Femmes) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

40. **Ms. Ait-Baala** (Action Internationale Femmes) noted that the main victims of the long conflict in Western Sahara were the civilian refugees in Tindouf. She therefore welcomed the recent talks held between the parties, in Manhasset, and expressed support for the Moroccan proposal for autonomy for the region, which had been described as "credible and serious" in Security Council resolution 1754 (2007).

41. Humanitarian concerns must be addressed immediately. In that connection, she drew attention to a press release, published on 9 May 2007 by Reporters without Borders, which confirmed the existence of slavery in the camps. The report had been prepared by two Australian journalists who had been detained by the Frente POLISARIO because they were investigating the situation of black members of the community and the existence of slavery. They had finally been released thanks to the intervention of representatives of MINURSO. She called on all humanitarian organizations working in the camps to denounce all such human rights violations that they witnessed.

42. The difference between the image the Frente POLISARIO tried to present and the cruel reality in Tindouf was striking. According to Baba Sayed, the brother of the founder of the movement, the role of the Frente POLISARIO intelligence service was to repress dissent and it had the right to arrest, interrogate, torture and assassinate with impunity. According to that same source, the situation of Saharans under the Frente POLISARIO was worse than that of those under Moroccan occupation for the Frente POLISARIO's main objective was to protect its own interests. The great majority of Saharans were disgusted with its management of their cause. Given the human tragedy in the camps, the international community must do everything within its power to protect the civilian population in the camps and, in particular, to ensure an end to the practice of slavery in the camps and bring those responsible to justice.

43. *Ms. Ait-Baala withdrew.*

44. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Ms. Warburg (Freedom for All) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

45. **Ms. Warburg** (Freedom for All) expressed grave concern at the human rights abuses perpetrated in the camps in Tindouf and called for an international commission of inquiry to investigate those abuses and punish those responsible.

46. The new Moroccan proposal for autonomy for the Sahara region was a welcome opportunity to ensure a peaceful resolution to the conflict. It would grant the refugees in Tindouf the same rights under a democratically elected autonomous government as those already enjoyed by Saharans living in Morocco and was supported by the overwhelming majority of the Western Saharan people. The international community should support the proposal.

47. The fact that Saharan tribes had always been a nomadic people made their internment in the camps even more objectionable. Moreover, husbands and wives were separated, and had to request permission to see each other, and children were sent abroad — in violation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child — as a means of enforcing compliance with the totalitarian exercise of power by the Frente POLISARIO. Freedom of movement did not exist within the camps. Fear, intimidation and arbitrary punishment pervaded the camps.

48. Humanitarian aid was resold by the Frente POLISARIO and their Algerian masters. Recent attempts by the Frente POLISARIO to sell water at exorbitant prices had prompted the Algerian army to intervene in order to avert an uprising. Refugees who had recently escaped from the camps had recounted increasing exploitation by the Frente POLISARIO leadership, including in the provision of food and milk for babies. Those were examples of how the Frente POLISARIO cruelly abused and exploited the refugees while deceiving and defrauding the international community.

49. Finally, she called on the Organization to help end the misery of the Saharan refugees by persuading Algeria and the Frente POLISARIO, which represented only a minority of Saharans, to negotiate freely with Morocco in the interests of bringing about a peaceful and prosperous future for all the people of the Maghreb.

50. *Ms. Warburg withdrew.*

51. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Chapaux (research fellow at the Université Libre de Bruxelles) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

52. **Mr. Chapaux**, speaking in his personal capacity, said that while the responsibility of the State that had invaded Western Sahara, as well as that of States assisting it, for denying the people of Western Sahara their right to self-determination was well established, third party states also bore some responsibility. The International Law Commission had underscored the peremptory character of the right to self-determination and the responsibility of all States to cooperate to bring to an end any serious breach of such a peremptory norm. The international community therefore had an

obligation to act with regard to the situation in Western Sahara.

53. While it might be argued that that obligation was an obligation of means and not of result only requiring States to make use of all available means to stop the breach, whereby the inadequacy of available means absolved States of their responsibility, he said that such an argument was incorrect. Adequate means were, in fact, available; the combined resources of the international community could easily bring about a settlement of the conflict. Moreover, absence of political consensus was not a justification for inaction since the central issue was not political but juridical. The international community had a legal obligation to act to bring to an end the breach of international law in Western Sahara; thus failure to do so was, in itself, a breach of international law.

54. *Mr. Chapaux withdrew.*

55. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Ms. Bahaijoub (Family Protection) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

56. **Ms. Bahaijoub** (Family Protection) recalling that, prior to 1912, Western Sahara had been an integral part of the Kingdom of Morocco, welcomed the Moroccan proposal for autonomy as a viable solution to the conflict. The Frente POLISARIO's call for a referendum was unrealistic given the differences between the parties concerning the eligibility of voters. In that context, she wondered why the Algerian authorities systematically refused to allow a census of the refugees in the Tindouf camps. If they were truly Saharans, they should be allowed to go wherever they wanted rather than being confined to a military zone. The continued confinement of a nomadic desert people was a violation of their human rights. The authorities should therefore authorize a census and the international community should give serious consideration to the merits of the Moroccan proposal. The latter offered Saharans the right to a leading role in the region, without discrimination or exclusion, and all the guarantees afforded by the Moroccan Constitution and would put an end to the suffering of the refugees in the Tindouf camps.

57. In the meantime, however, the plight of the civilian population in the camps must be addressed. For example, food supplies remained inadequate and there were reports that supplies were being misappropriated. In addition, the fate of the hundreds of prisoners who had disappeared from the camps should be investigated and the remains of those who had been buried in the camps, including those buried near the Polisario headquarters at Rabouni, should be sent home so that their families could bury their dead in a dignified manner. The deafening silence of the Algerian authorities on that issue was a flagrant violation of international law. Finally, she welcomed the United Nations-sponsored Saharan family visits between Morocco and Algeria and hoped all genuine Saharans held in the camps would soon be allowed to rejoin their homeland without restrictions or intimidation.

58. *Ms. Bahaijoub withdrew.*

59. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Ducarme (Belgian Parliament) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

60. **Mr. Ducarme** (Belgian Parliament) said that, pursuant to positions taken by his Government on the rights of the child, child labour and child soldiers, for the better part of the year he had been conducting a parliamentary investigation into charges that the rights of Saharan children were being violated in the Tindouf region and in Cuba, involving lengthy forced separation from the family from the earliest ages, deprivation of liberty, forced labour, political indoctrination and imposed military training.

61. The evidence provided had been sufficiently credible to prompt him to set up a humanitarian Belgian mission comprising a member of the Government, representatives of the various religions and specialists in the rights of the child. It, together with human rights NGOs, a team of psychologists and other parliamentarians, had begun to hear witnesses in Laayoune. Contacts had been made with Moroccan, Algerian and Cuban authorities and with representatives of the Frente POLISARIO to facilitate the gathering of evidence. Its report would be submitted the following year to the Belgian Parliament and various other bodies and they would decide if a further inquiry was needed.

62. *Mr. Ducarme withdrew.*

63. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Olarte Cullen (Former President, Autonomous Community of the Canary Islands) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

64. **Mr. Olarte Cullen** (Former President, Autonomous Community of the Canary Islands), speaking as a former member of the Spanish Parliament and of the Commission that had overseen the process of decolonization of Western Sahara completed by Spain in 1975, reviewed the political developments and shifting allegiances in the Territory since then. The Canary Islands, which shared a history and extensive relations with their close neighbours, the Saharan people, had for many years budgeted substantial humanitarian aid for the inhabitants of Tindouf; that aid had gone to meet the people's basic needs and never to the military activities of the Frente POLISARIO.

65. To prevent the Saharans from resorting to violence, he urged the parties to the conflict to make a supreme effort to reach a peace accord; that would require meeting on an equal footing and a willingness to compromise. A possible stumbling block, however, would be any territorial ambitions that Algeria, which had in the past offered shelter to part of the Saharan people, might be harbouring. The Moroccan King had declared his intention of giving the Saharan people a broad degree of autonomy, which he had never done for any other part of his nation, which was extremely centralized, and the proposal had received nationwide political support.

66. If the parties to the conflict agreed and the United Nations approved, Spain would have to amend its Constitution to permit the granting of a statute of full autonomy to the Saharan people, giving them the kind of broad powers that came with free association status. The autonomy statute should provide for the three components of any democratic system — legislative, executive and judicial — and those basic institutions should be complemented by an ombudsman's office to safeguard human rights, an economic and social council and an advisory council. The respective constitutional powers of the Saharan region and the Moroccan State would have to be specified and there should be a separate Saharan treasury to ensure the region's maximum social and economic development. Finally, the draft statute should be submitted to a self-determination referendum.

67. *Mr. Olarte Cullen withdrew.*

68. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. El Moussaoui (Royal Advisory Council for Saharan Affairs, Morocco) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

69. **Mr. El Moussaoui** (Royal Advisory Council for Saharan Affairs, Morocco), reviewing the history of Western Sahara, recalled that recently Morocco, responding to the Security Council's call for a political solution to the conflict, had proposed an autonomy statute for the Saharans living in its territory that would allow them to administer their own affairs under Moroccan sovereignty and preserve national unity and territorial integrity. The Government had consulted the political parties and representatives of the population in a democratic, inclusive manner that guaranteed their approval of the concept of autonomy.

70. The Royal Advisory Council, compromising representatives of all the tribal, political and socio-economic components of the population of the Saharan region, had been set up in that context. Its mission was to propose steps for the return of all Saharans to the country and their reintegration and one of its first tasks had been to draft the autonomy statute. The President of the Council had participated in the Manhasset talks.

71. The autonomy being offered guaranteed that all Saharans, without discrimination or exclusion, would participate as appropriate in the regional as well as national institutions. Morocco had taken part in the latest rounds of negotiations in an open and conciliatory spirit and with a determination to reach a solution based on a self-determination referendum that guaranteed Saharan autonomy and safeguarded the interests of all the parties.

72. The latest elections had shown beyond a doubt that the Saharans wanted to be a part of the democratic process in Morocco. The Frente POLISARIO claimed that it wanted a self-determination referendum, yet it had set up a self-proclaimed Saharan Arab Democratic Republic on Algerian territory without taking into consideration the opinion of the majority of the authentic Saharans living in the Saharan territory.

73. To prolong the conflict would merely add to the sufferings of the Saharan brothers in the Tindouf camps and neighbouring areas. A desperate generation there was beginning to engage in weapons and drug trafficking, human trafficking and the creation of an Al-Qaida terrorist wing in southern Algeria. There was also the risk that Algeria's obstructionism would destabilize the Maghreb and the southern Mediterranean.

74. *Mr. El Moussaoui withdrew.*

75. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. Fucito (Member, Naples City Council) took place at the petitioners' table.*

76. **Mr. Fucito** (Member, International Relations Commission, Naples City Council) said that Naples had, for centuries, been a reference point for the entire Mediterranean region and a crossroads for the people of North Africa; all its citizens coexisted peacefully. In that spirit, the City Council had in recent years welcomed Saharan children and had thus learned about conditions in the refugee camps. Naples has also awarded honorary citizenship to a Saharan leader imprisoned by Morocco for her ideas.

77. The United Nations must insist on holding an immediate referendum for the self-determination of the Saharan people. It must also extend the mandate of MINURSO to ensure the protection of individual human rights and the creation of an effective form of democracy in Western Sahara.

78. *Mr. Fucito withdrew.*

79. *Mr. Maleki (Islamic Republic of Iran, Vice-Chairman) took the Chair.*

80. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Ms. Abba Hemeida (student) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

81. **Ms. Abba Hemeida** (student), said that she had been raised in a refugee camp under the harshest of conditions and her father had been killed in the war with Morocco when she was two years old. Saharans living in Moroccan-occupied Western Sahara also suffered under the yoke of oppression. Men and women of all ages were unjustly imprisoned, tortured and humiliated by the Moroccan police. Their identity and culture were ridiculed and they were insulted with the vilest words. The violence of the Moroccan police was so great that Saharans were afraid to walk the streets.

82. Although the Moroccan occupation of the Saharan homeland had split the nation in two, one half living under occupation and the other in refugee camps, Saharans still clung to the dream that one day the long-awaited referendum on self-determination would be held and that the flag of a free Western Sahara would fly over its capital, Laayoune.

83. *Ms. Abba Hemeida withdrew.*

84. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Ms. Cervone (Christian Democratic Women International) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

85. **Ms. Cervone** (Christian Democratic Women International) said that the question of Western Sahara should have been resolved in 1975, when the International Court of Justice issued its advisory opinion. Unfortunately, Algeria continued to use the issue to undermine Morocco's territorial integrity. Accordingly, the refugees living in the Tindouf camps under the rule of the Frente POLISARIO continued to suffer. No amount of propaganda could mask the reality that the camps were a lawless "no man's land" where the smuggling of arms, cigarettes and clandestine immigrants thrived.

86. She was outraged that the Frente POLISARIO continued to send children to Cuba. While it was gratifying that they were being educated there, Saharan children, some as young as seven years old, were being forcibly taken from their families. By the time they returned home, some 20 years later they would have lost all ties to their families and culture. What was more, they returned home without a diploma or certificate to prove they had actually completed their studies.

87. The Moroccan proposal on autonomy, which was supported by the majority of the Saharan people, offered a unique opportunity for a peaceful resolution to the conflict in Western Sahara and should be supported by the United Nations and all peace-loving countries.

88. *Ms. Cervone withdrew.*

89. **Ms. Hernández Toledano** (Cuba) strenuously denied the accusations made by various petitioners against her country. People were not deported to Cuba. It was Cuba's policy to offer scholarships to students from the Non-Self-Governing Territories and it reported each year on the offers of study and training facilities it had made. Currently there were over 500 Saharan students studying in Cuba of their own free will as reported in the document A/62/68/Add.1. Moreover, over 30,000 third-world students were currently studying in Cuba, free of charge and many more had done so since the beginning of the revolution, including over 30,000 Africans. Foreign students were required to return to their home countries as a condition of their acceptance. Cuba had made

great efforts to ensure that its academic degrees were internationally recognized.

90. Other Member States should be encouraged to follow Cuba's generous example.

91. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Ms. Errazti (Eusko Alkartasuna) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

92. **Ms. Errazti** (Eusko Alkartasuna) said that the right of the Saharan people to self-determination was guaranteed by international law. The autonomy proposed by Morocco was merely an attempt by that country to impede the exercise of that right. Morocco, despite its claims, had no legal right to exercise sovereignty over Western Sahara; it had assumed control of that territory by the use of force. The United Nations had never authorized the Moroccan occupation of that territory. On the other hand, the Frente POLISARIO was recognized as the sole legitimate representative of the Saharan people.

93. The peaceful uprising of the Saharan people against their Moroccan occupiers had been met with an intensified campaign of repression, documented by numerous independent observers, including the United Nations and Amnesty International. Consequently, the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) should increase the scope of its activities to include the monitoring of respect for human rights.

94. *Ms. Errazti withdrew.*

95. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Ms. d'Origny took a place at the petitioners' table.*

96. **Ms. d'Origny**, speaking in her capacity as a private individual, reminded delegates that Morocco invaded Western Sahara in defiance of the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice. Spain was still legally responsible for Western Sahara as the administering Power and any business transactions with Morocco in respect of the territory only served to legitimize the illegal use of force.

97. Recalling that the Committee had been instrumental in securing a referendum for Timor-Leste resulting in the creation of the first new State of the twenty-first century, she called on Committee members to force Morocco to end its occupation and allow the Saharan people to exercise the right of self-determination.

98. *Ms. d'Origny withdrew.*

99. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Mr. López García (University of Madrid) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

100. **Mr. López García** (University of Madrid) said that the history of Western Sahara and its people was a series of lost opportunities to peacefully decolonize that non-self-governing territory. The Moroccan proposal for negotiating an autonomy statute for the Sahara region would give the people substantial control over their own affairs in a decentralized and democratic Morocco. It represented the best opportunity to successfully complete the decolonization process and had already led to two rounds of negotiations in Manhasset.

101. While Morocco was to be commended for the general amnesty it had proposed, it should not wait for the successful conclusion of negotiations before putting an end to its repressive tactics. The Frente POLISARIO, for its part, should recognize that the autonomy proposed by Morocco was confirmation that its long struggle to free the Saharan people had been worthwhile, and that it was not simply a ploy to maintain the status quo, but rather the first step towards building a democratic and united Maghreb.

102. *Mr. López García withdrew.*

103. *At the invitation of the Chairman, Ms. Miranda (Emigration Committee of the Galician Nacionalist a Bloc) took a place at the petitioners' table.*

104. **Ms. Miranda** (Emigration Committee of the Galician Nacionalist a Bloc) said that the question of Western Sahara was not merely a humanitarian problem, but a legal and political one that the United Nations was obliged to resolve.

105. In order to guarantee regional peace and stability, Morocco, which was illegally exploiting the natural resources of Western Sahara, should return the territory to its rightful owners, the Saharan people. It should also be made to understand that a free and fair referendum on self-determination was not subject to negotiation; it was the only legitimate means by which the question of Western Sahara could be resolved.

106. *Ms. Miranda withdrew.*

The meeting rose at 6.15 p.m.